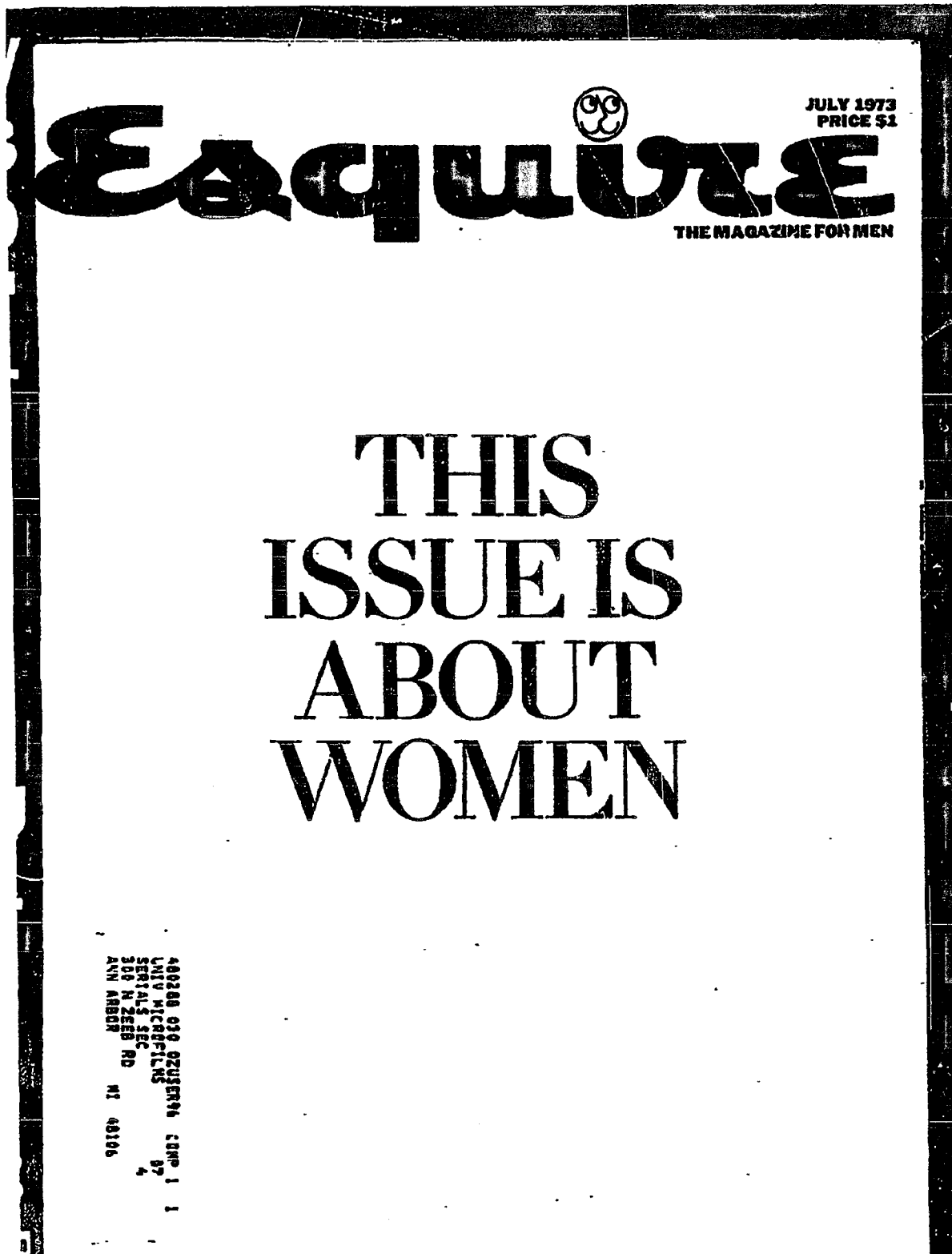


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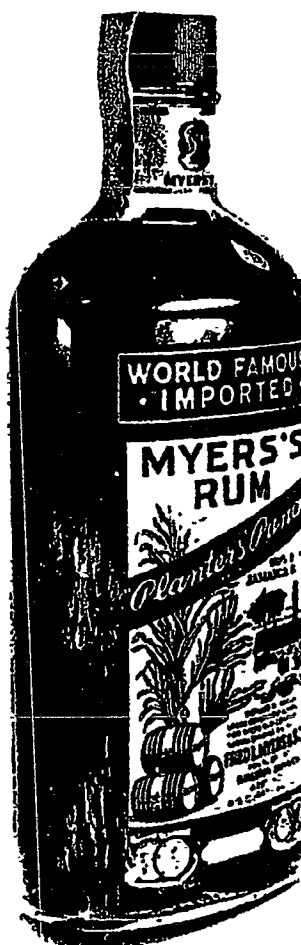
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ESQUIRE JULY 1954

Marilyn Monroe's Last Picture Show

by Walter Bernstein

"Next to her," said the assistant director, "Lucrezia Borgia was a pussycat"



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Now that Marilyn Monroe is well on the way to becoming symbol and myth, I think of the short time I knew her as actress and star. I never got to know her well, but I did see her in action, working or trying to work, and that is a not insignificant way to know something of someone, even if it does not add to the mythology. It started on a warm, smoggy afternoon in the Spring of 1962, when I reported to the Twentieth Century-Fox studio in Hollywood, California, as the scriptwriter on a motion picture called *Something's Got to Give*. The star of the picture was to be Marilyn Monroe; the costar was Dean Martin; and the picture itself was based on a successful comedy made by R.K.O. in 1939 and called *My Favorite Wife*. The stars of that film were Cary Grant and Irene Dunne. However, after buying the old picture in order to remake it, Fox had decided they did not want to remake it. Instead, they would take its basic premise—the unexpected return of a wife, presumed dead for seven years, on the day her husband has remarried—and construct an entirely new story. Six writers, individually and in tandem, had labored in successive to do this, and finally a script was approved. On the basis of this script, sets were built, actors signed to iron-clad contracts and a starting date set for actual production. Two weeks before that date, I was hired to rewrite the script. By that time, the story costs alone were over three hundred thousand dollars, but Twentieth Century-Fox was a company that had lost twenty-two million in 1961, and its executives then were not easily awed by figures. To balance this expense, they were getting Miss Monroe on an old commitment for only one hundred thousand dollars, much less than her usual salary. Also, she had lost fifteen pounds and everyone said she looked better than she had in years. She had approved the leading man, the director, the cameraman, the clothes designer and the hairdresser. She did not have script approval, but she did not seem to want it. The latest script had been written by an old and canny Hollywood hand, brought in at Miss Monroe's request, and she approved of him. Although underpaid, she was eager to work. A cautious optimism seemed justified.

Twentieth Century-Fox had always been considered one of the choicer movie studios at which to work, not because of the work itself,

which was no different from that turned out by other studios, but because of the ambience. The grounds were spacious, the offices pleasant, the studio restaurant served uncommonly good food at reasonable prices and there was a huge back lot to explore, with a complete small town and a decaying Southern mansion and even an artificial lake with banks where a writer could lie and read and take a nap. There were always several movies being shot at any one time and the streets flowed with pirates and dancing girls and cowboys and Indians, and the air vibrated with that special sense of childhood excitement peculiar to a movie studio. But when I arrived, the streets of the studio were empty and quiet. A stillness hung in the air; it was like a tropical town during winter. I went first to the office bungalow assigned to the director, George Cukor. I had worked with Cukor before and looked forward to working with him again. He was a man then in his early sixties, fussy and stimulating, with a record of many distinguished films and a youthful capacity for approaching each new film as if it were his first. His pictures had great style and he was full of an invigorating, malicious wit. With him was Gene Allen, the associate producer and art director. Allen looked exactly like what he had once been, a Los Angeles cop. He had a round, friendly, Irish face that became instantly suspicious at any sign of malfeasance. People who did not know him were often surprised to find this housing a sensitive taste and a first-rate talent. Our reunion was pleasant, and Cukor suggested that I see the old movie before anything else, and then read the latest script, and then we would meet with the producer and decide what had to be done.

I saw the old movie in a studio projection room, sitting alone in the dark and marveling at a kind of comedy that does not come out of this country anymore. It was adult farce, neither overproduced nor self-satisfied, clever without being cheap, performed by actors whose ages matched the parts they played, and fearless in its mixture of lunacy and sentiment. Afterward, I read the script that was to be shot, and then met with Cukor, Allen and the producer, a tall, pudgy young man named Henry T. Weinstein. He was a staff producer for Fox who had been assigned to the picture. I was told, because he was a friend of Miss Monroe's psychoanalyst. Since the main job of any producer of a

Monroe picture was to get Miss Monroe to work on time, the studio felt this was a vital connection. Weinstein was a man incapable of being still. Throughout our meeting, he paced anxiously before an invisible walling wall, a cigarette always in a corner of his mouth, ashes flaking on his chest, his voice rising and falling, since Weinstein did not talk, he supplicated. His manner was that of a boy on his way to the principal's office to be punished. His face shone with a kind of eager worry, as though he knew he deserved the terrible things that were going to happen to him. He was very anxious that I not make too many changes in the script. He thought it just needed a little polishing here and there. Cukor thought it needed to be rewritten from beginning to end. He was in favor of restoring as much of the old movie as possible, on the theory that no one had yet managed to improve upon it and, in any case, there was no time left to try. I suggested one change that involved doing this, and Weinstein shook his head. "Marilyn won't play it that way," he said positively. I asked him why not. "That way, when the wife comes back and finds the husband married again, she goes off to stop the honeymoon, right?" he said. "Well, she says Marilyn Monroe doesn't chase after a man. The man chases after her." I suggested that, since Miss Monroe did not have script approval, we make the change anyway. "You don't understand," Weinstein said. "Marilyn doesn't need script approval. If she doesn't like something, she just doesn't show up."

Later that afternoon, Allen took me to see the first set that had been built. He had designed it as a replica of Cukor's own home, complete with garden and swimming pool. I have always been awed by the miracles that movie technicians can perform. Built in the center of the huge, dim, cavernous sound stage, the house was both real and magical, a doll's house grown to proper size. Allen took me through the rooms. They seemed entirely normal, the furnishings smart and modern, enclosed by proper walls. But when I looked up, there was no ceiling, only a network of cables and catwalks and a bank of great spotlights staring impassively down at me. We went outside to the garden, where workmen were painting the pool and spraying the shrubbery to make it look greener. The cameraman, a gentle, soft-spoken European named Franz Planer, moved among them with

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quiet assurance, testing the light. Occasionally he would speak softly to the chief electrician, who would call up to another man high above the set, and a spotlight would be dimmed or heightened. The scene seemed chaotic, but none of the activity was without purpose. Everyone knew what he was doing. Then, from one of the rooms upstairs, we heard voices and a man's voice raised suddenly above the others. "But how do you get the camera in here?" the voice asked peevishly. "The doors are too narrow!" One of the painters had stopped to listen and now shook his head. "The silly son of a bitch don't even know the walls move out," he said. I asked Allen whom the voice belonged to. "Mr. Levathes," he said. "The head of the studio." We left the set and went to sit in Cukor's mobile dressing room in a corner of the stage. We were joined by the assistant director, a jovial and muscular man with the face of a shrewd Sioux. His name was David Hall, but everyone called him Buck. He had been the assistant director on several pictures starring Miss Monroe. She had failed to enchant him. "Next to her," he said with feeling, "Lucrèce Borgia was a pussycat." Hall was not impressed by what others considered her vulnerability. All he could see was that she always got her own way. Like the rest of the crew, he thought the shooting schedule of forty-seven days a big joke, designed to impress the stockholders. "We'll be lucky if we finish in eighty," he said. He offered a prediction as to how the picture would start. "She'll get sick and miss most of the first week," he said. "So we shoot around her and maybe she comes in Friday and we get one shot of her about three in the afternoon. But that's too much for her. It only makes her sick again, so she's out half the next week." He thought for a moment. "All the next week." He thought they would get the first real scene with her the start of the third week.

I talked with Hall and Allen for a while and then returned to my office. My secretary was on the telephone. She was a tiny, determined woman named Dolly who had been at Fox for twenty years and knew everything. I was already afraid of her. She had been the secretary for two of the previous writers on the script and, in addition, had a very high opinion of the writer I was following. "I don't see

how they could get anyone better than him," she had informed me when we first met. Later, she had said to me suspiciously, "You're not a gagman, are you? Because they certainly don't need a gagman on this script." I had said I wasn't a gagman, but she seemed only partially mollified. Now, as I passed through her office into mine, I could hear her on the phone, saying, "Well, I'm back on *Something's Got to Give*." As I closed the connecting door, she was saying, "No, I don't know for how long. I don't know yet how long this one's going to be around."

I worked the next week on scenes that Cukor and I agreed should be rewritten. I discovered that the atmosphere of sleaze I had felt upon arrival was the normal activity of the studio. Even when I came in one Sunday, there seemed no difference between the studio closed and the studio open. Very little moved; the streets were empty; the buildings sat heavy and quiet in the sun. One afternoon, I took a walk to the back lot, but there was no back lot. It had been sold for a housing development. There was only a vast expanse of dirt where the small town and the lake and the Southern mansion had been. I stood at the fence that had been erected to separate progress from illusion and watched a fleet of bulldozers leveling the dirt. They were moving away and their drivers could not be seen through the haze of dust they raised. The machines seemed self-sufficient, even alive, and it seemed as if it were their own option where they would go and what they would level. Most of the time, I just went between Cukor's office and my own. We worked together, often with the help of Gene Allen, taking what we could from the old movie, adding what we could of our own, and the result slowly became a script that we thought was warm and funny. We made the change that Miss Monroe might construe as making her a pursuer of men, and we were pleased that it seemed to work so well. There was no reason why it shouldn't, since it had worked so well in the old picture. No one bothered us.

Each day, Weinstein would call to ask how many pages I had written, but his chief preoccupation was Miss Monroe. She had announced that she was going to New York for the weekend. She wanted to see a drama teacher named Leo Stranberg and work with him before starting the picture. No one wanted her to go; it was considered risky

to let her out of sight. Cukor remonstrated with her gently, but he had no power to dissuade her. The studio had the power, and I was in Cukor's office when Levathes called and announced firmly that Miss Monroe would not be allowed to go to New York, certainly not a week before shooting. Friday morning, Weinstein called me and said Miss Monroe was arriving to see Cukor for a script conference and would I please be there? She was to be there at ten. I was there at ten and so were Cukor and Allen and Weinstein. Miss Monroe arrived at twelve, breathless and apologetic. She was on her way to the airport. She knew the studio disapproved, but she felt that no one would really mind her little trip to New York. "I'm just going, you know, to oil the machinery," she said. She was dressed in a flowered-print shirt and black slacks, and she wore high-heeled beige sandals and a bandanna around her hair and sunglasses, which she took off to show us her eyes, red and weepy from eye treatments she was taking. She was in good humor and full of energy, a trait I had not associated with her. Her enthusiasm seemed spontaneous, and she included everyone in it. She was not glamorous; she was not even very pretty; but her appeal was genuine, a child's appeal, sweet and disarming. But when I demurred at one of her suggestions, her smile turned frosty at the edges. "Don't be such a writer," she said impatiently. Her main suggestion for the script was that her character be made more exciting. Everyone agreed that the suggestion was sound. The meeting did not last long. After about half an hour, the studio doctor came to give her a vitamin injection. With him was Buck Hall. Miss Monroe went into an inner office with the doctor, and nobody said anything for a moment, and then Cukor said, "Mind you, I like her." "Oh, she really wants to do the picture," Weinstein said vigorously. Miss Monroe returned, rolling down her sleeve, and said a gay farewell. We all wished her a good trip. No one tried to discourage her going; there seemed no point in trying. When she had gone, the doctor said he had been treating her since she was a minor actress at the studio and had not seen her in such high spirits for years. "She's way up," he said. Weinstein beamed, happy to be confirmed. "Whatever goes up, comes down," Buck Hall said darkly. But Miss Monroe returned Sunday night, as she had said she

would. I assumed the studio would be reassured, but Weinstein called me Monday in a state of some agitation. "Lee Strasberg likes the script," he said, horrified. I asked him which script. "The one we're changing," he said. "He just thinks it needs more jokes." I said that was not what it needed and he agreed quickly, but said this was now a factor to be reckoned with. Since Mr. Strasberg was a sort of guru to Miss Monroe. Then he said that Levathes had received the first batch of rewritten pages and had called him in and yelled at him, that I was changing too much of the script. I had been hired to polish, not to disembowel. The criticism puzzled me. I had changed very little in that first batch. Most of it was copied straight from the previous script. "Well, he's screaming they're all his pages," Weinstein said. It can't be, then. Levathes had not read the pages. He had just seen them mimeographed on blue paper, where the previous script had been on white paper, and he had assumed that a new color must mean new words. No one had explained to him that, according to studio custom, my draft of the script, no matter if it were a verbatim copy of the former draft, would all be on blue paper. "You're sure you're not changing too much?" Weinstein asked nervously. He was growing more apprehensive as the time came for Miss Monroe to start work. He tried bravely to conceal this with an assured manner that formed an interesting contrast to the beads of sweat that suddenly stood out on his face whenever the star's name was mentioned. His fears were understandable. He had placed his head in the mouth of a lioness whose appetite he had thought sated. Now, as lunchtime approached, he was not so sure.

By the end of the week, some forty pages of final script had been written, rewritten, approved, mimeographed on fresh blue paper and delivered to all concerned with the production. The next day, Miss Monroe requested a meeting with Cukor. Gene Allen was also present, and afterward he came to my office with the script restored the way Miss Monroe wanted it. Our changes had been unacceptable to her. She wished her character to meet her husband by coincidence, rather than by running after him. A scene I had inserted from the old picture, in which she met her children after

seven years, was also unacceptable. The children in that scene treated her coolly, since she was a stranger to them. Miss Monroe wanted to win them over at once, without even having to tell them she was their mother. I thought the result for the picture would be disastrous. So did Allen. He said Cukor had tried his best to convince her, but she had been sweetly adamant. I called Weinstein, but he said I didn't understand. "She can't stand rejection," he explained. I hung up and went to see Cukor. He had taken the matter to Levathes, who had given him no support at all. So long as the changes Miss Monroe requested did not involve major reconstruction, such as the building of new sets, the studio was willing to give them to her. Cukor was already preparing for the future. "Mind you, I like her," he kept saying. We talked for a while, trying to convince ourselves that her changes were not as fundamental as we thought. When I left, I had a headache that started at the base of my skull and ended just behind my eyes.

Shooting was to start at nine o'clock on the following Monday morning. I arrived at the studio a little after nine and went directly to the set. Miss Monroe was not there. I saw Buck Hall and he said she was not going to be there. "She's sick," he said. He was not smiling; now that production had started, jokes were dangerous. Weinstein was pacing around the pool, looking ready to jump in. He seemed taken by surprise, not by what had happened, but how it was done. "She caught a cold from Lee Strasberg," he said incredulously. He had black circles around his eyes. "I didn't sleep all weekend," he said. "I was on the phone with her. Two, three, four in the morning. My wife is ready to divorce me." I asked him where her analyst was and he said the analyst was going to Europe. "And it's not even August," he said bitterly. He seemed to take it as a personal betrayal. He said Dean Martin was in his dressing room, ready for work, and Cukor was in his dressing room with Levathes, figuring out what work was ready. They came out finally. Levathes a dark, well-groomed, nervous man, biting his lip as he hurried away. Cukor called Buck Hall over and said they would take reaction shots of Dean Martin today and start the next day with scenes that did not involve Miss Monroe. The studio doctor had seen her and she did have a fever. She would probably not be in for the rest of

the week. Hall nodded and went to give instructions to the crew. I went to my office to start writing these scenes.

Miss Monroe did not come in that week or the following week. Cukor shot scenes involving Dean Martin, Cyd Charisse, who played the other woman, and other actors. Everyone came on time and worked hard and professionally. Martin's intolerance concealed, for his own purposes, a talented and cooperative actor. Miss Charisse was friendly and beautiful. Bulletins were issued daily on Miss Monroe's condition. Her fever was slowly sinking; it was now below a hundred degrees, but she still did not feel well. "What do you expect?" the studio doctor asked. "She's got one doctor treating her eyes, so they hurt. Then she's got another one for her nose, so that hurts. Why should she feel well?" Weinstein scurried between the patient and the studio, bearing information and relaying wishes. Miss Monroe wanted to know the color of Miss Charisse's hair. "She's convinced Cyd wants to be a blonde like her," Weinstein said. He had assured her that Miss Charisse was wearing her hair in its natural color, which was light brown, but he had not gotten far. "Her manager wants it blonde," Miss Monroe had said knowingly. Miss Charisse's hair was checked for any telltale glints and, just to be safe, the light-brown hair of the actress playing the housekeeper, a woman in her fifties, was darkened a shade or two. Once, Weinstein arrived on the set with a small, dumpy woman wearing large, black-rimmed glasses and a black shawl over her head. She looked like a matronly Russian witch. Weinstein introduced her as Paula Strasberg, wife of Lee Strasberg, and personal drama coach to Miss Monroe. Later, he came back alone and said with great relief, "Paula liked the set!" He spoke as if the set would have had to be dismantled if Mrs. Strasberg had not liked it. He also told me that, since Marilyn read all the scenes, any reference to Miss Charisse as beautiful, seductive or desirable should be excised, along with any indication that Dean Martin, playing the husband of both these alluring ladies, was even for a moment attracted to anyone but Miss Monroe. No matter how lunatic her demands, they were met with dispatch and even optimism, based mainly on the fact that her illness seemed purely physical. "She's really got an infection," Levathes told Cukor happily. "It can't be psychological. It's a germ." The

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implication was that, once cured, Miss Monroe would race through the picture, saving the studio's money with her speed. Usually, Miss Monroe's worries were eased through Weinstein, who would credit the source, but sometimes they came through Levathes, who had the studio's face to save, and so would offer them as suggestions of his own. This enraged Cukor, since most of these suggestions had already been conveyed to him personally by Miss Monroe. "Mind you," Cukor said to me, after Levathes had suggested that perhaps the script needed more jokes. "I would not care if they said the only way to make this picture was to lie down and let her walk all over us. That, at least, would be honest. But the *lylly*? The *ludicrous*!" The pretence seemed to bother him more than the situation. He kept trying to get Levathes to admit that, so far as our picture was concerned, Twentieth Century-Fox was actually being run by the Strasbergers. He did not succeed. "I am the executive producer of this picture," Levathes told him firmly. "Weinstein is the producer and you are the director. Marilyn does not have script approval." But a new procedure was developed to save time. I was to meet daily with Weinstein and the story editor, a man named Straus. Weinstein would already have been in touch with Miss Monroe and would know what she wanted. I was to write the scenes with her needs in mind and show them to Cukor. His revisions would then be incorporated and the result would be what was shot. No other changes would be made. Authority would rest safely in executive hands, where it belonged. Cukor thought it might save even more time if the writer met directly with Miss Monroe. Everyone thought this was a fine idea. Toward the end of the second week of shooting, Weinstein burst on the set with heady news. Miss Monroe's temperature was down to ninety-eight point eight, only two tenths of a degree above normal. "I get a higher fever than that walking up the stairs," Buck Hall muttered. Her doctor would not commit himself, but there was a chance she might come to work on Monday.

That Sunday afternoon I went to Miss Monroe's home for a story conference. She had recently bought a Mexican-style house, pleasant and unpretentious. She met me at the door, her hair in curlers, her face pale from her confinement. Her manner was friendly, but she seemed to have little energy. Her

smile was wan. She apologized for the bareness of the house; she had bought furniture in Mexico, which had not yet arrived. The living room contained only one chair and she insisted I sit in it. She sat on the floor, her script before her on a low coffee table, and we went over several of the scenes. She was very shy about her own suggestions, as though she felt they were unworthy. But she had obviously been working on her part and, like a good actor, had found insights that improved the character she played. On the other hand, also like an actor, many of her ideas were good for her and not so good for the story. But if I hinted at this, her face would go blank for a second, as though the current had been turned off, and when it was turned on again, she would continue as though I had said nothing at all, not disagreeing with me, not even referring to what I had said, simply going on with what followed. I had met this reaction before. It is the normal, uncomplicated self-involvement of the movie star. It stems from a splendid and incorruptible narcissism. Sometimes she would refer to herself in the third person, like Caesar. "Remember you've got Marilyn Monroe," she said, when she wanted to wear a bikini in one scene. "You've got to use her." Her manner was at once tentative, apologetic and insouciant. We spent an amiable few hours. She delighted in acting out her part, particularly the moments when she was supposed to give a Swedish accent. She had been practicing with a special teacher and she did the accent with charming accuracy. She was very pleased with my applause. We discussed nothing that could not have been handled easier on the set. The meeting was pointless, except to reinforce her authority. Before I left, she offered me Mexican beer and showed me around the house. Then we went out into the garden and she showed me where she was going to plant trees. She was proud of the house; it evidently meant a great deal to her. She was eager that it be liked. I left feeling like a deck-hand on a ship with no one at the helm and the water ahead full of rocks.

She came to work on Monday, almost on time, and Cukor was able to get a few silent shots of her by the end of the day. But Weinstein reported gloomily that her temperature was up to ninety-nine point two. "That takes care of the rest of the week," Buck Hall said. But he was wrong this time. She was too

sick to report the next day, but later that week, as I drove in to work one morning, the guard at the gate shouted, "She's back! She's back!" Martin and Cyd Charisse were waiting on the set, costumed and ready to work. Miss Monroe was still in her dressing room. I said to Miss Charisse that at last we would get some scenes with our three principals. "Don't be so sure," she said. After an hour of waiting, Weinstein trudged into view, shaking his head like a fighter who has just been knocked out, but still cannot believe it. "She went home," he said, baffled. His eyes were a little wild. Miss Monroe had arrived, all right, only to discover that Dean Martin had a cold. She had refused to work with him and had gone home, deaf to medical testimony that he was no longer contagious. Martin was furious. He stood in front of his dressing room, swinging a golf club and muttering. Weinstein rallied fast. "You don't understand," he told anyone who would listen. "Her resistance is still very low." Cukor shot more scenes without her. By this time, we were running out of those scenes. No body wanted to face what would happen when we finally did run out. But she returned to work on Monday and worked until Wednesday. Then she announced she was leaving for New York the next day to appear at a birthday rally for President Kennedy. No one really believed she would be allowed to get away with this. Levathes came on the set to discuss it with Cukor. He wore the look of a permissive parent who had given his child a loaded gun to play with, and had then been shot with it. He looked disappointed in the child and in agony from the wound. But he announced firmly that Miss Monroe would certainly not be allowed to leave. Dean Martin had already rejected a similar invitation, saying he had to work.

She flew to New York on Thursday, promising to be back bright and early Monday morning. We worked that day and the next on the dwindling stock of scenes without her. Cukor was increasingly worried about those scenes. They had been hastily written and inadequately rehearsed. "I don't know what anyone else will see," he said, after watching the completed scenes on the screen, "but it's clear to me that the director doesn't quite know what the hell he is doing." But he worked with humor and invention, a captain fighting a gallant rearguard action in a battle already lost by the gen- (Continued on page 13)

MARILYN MONROE'S LAST PICTURE SHOW

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I was rather surprised by the feeling of the crew, who were quite open in their disgust. I had thought they would be grateful for the delay. There was much unemployment in the movie industry, then as now, and a longer schedule meant more money for them. Also, they were cynical men who did not really care what was in the movies they made. But they were certain and proud of their skill and they had been made to feel that this had no value; it was at the mercy of someone who could treat it only with disrespect. Curiously, they did not blame Miss Monroe. They did not like her, but she was a star, acting like a star. They did not expect her to be reasonable or even adjusted. But they had always worked in a time when craft, at least, had been respected, when performers performed, directors directed and producers produced. They did not want to accept that this time had passed, that what they were seeing was the logical consequence of an abdication that had begun years before, when the studios had first given up their power to actors. It was the end of an era. There was something grand about it, like witnessing the fall of the Roman Empire. People talked with nostalgia of the day when studios were run by movie-makers instead of lawyers and real-estate men. "Oh, you should have seen this place then!" my secretary would say. Her memories always went back to how good the food had been in the commissary. It seemed the basis of her pride in Twentieth Century-Fox. "The pastry!" she would exclaim. "The desserts that chef made! People came all the way from Warner's just to have lunch!" The chef was now cooking for another studio, where novices were made for television.

Miss Monroe kept her promise and returned to work on Monday and worked all that week. Mrs. Strasberg was always present when she did a scene. When it was done, Miss Monroe would look to her and Mrs. Strasberg would nod or shake her head to indicate whether she thought the scene was all right or should be done over. Between scenes, the two would consult together, both very serious, and then Miss Monroe would carry this seriousness back into the scene where, since the picture was a comedy, it did not always fit. She acted in a kind of slow motion that was hypnotic. Cukor thought now that she would not finish the picture. There was talk of replacing her, but the studio seemed paralyzed. No one seemed able to make a decision. I continued to meet in the mornings with Weinstein and Straus, a tired, intelligent man who tried to keep matters reasonable. The attempt was noble, but vain. None of us knew any longer what Miss Monroe wanted, only that she had to be pleased. She had turned on Weinstein and had stopped speaking to him. He was still trying to find out why, torn between relief and panic. In the meetings, he was thrown back on remembering what she had once said or guessing what she

might want. If he guessed wrong, he knew the tumbrels were waiting. He walked around with an acute pain in his back. "It'll hurt worse when you take the knife out," Buck Hall told him sympathetically.

But on the set, Miss Monroe was always shy and diffident with her suggestions. Once she came up to Cukor and asked permission to change a word. When it was granted, she clapped her hands in delight. She seemed thrilled that anyone would do this for her. Another time, she disliked a scene that had been extracted from the previous script at her insistence; it was the only scene in which she could wear a negligee. She felt no contradiction in first approving, then disapproving. She ruled with an appealing ambivalence. When Cukor suggested that all scenes be submitted to her for final approval, she was both pleased and reluctant. Half of her was saying she did not want this power that had been thrust upon her; she looked only for someone to take it away. The other half made it plain that she would kill anyone with it who tried. No one tried. Nobody cared anymore. There was a sense of the production grinding slowly to a halt. The machine was about to stop. Sets were made as to how long this would take. It took another two weeks. Miss Monroe worked during that time and everyone pretended nothing was going to happen. She did a scene in which she swam naked in the swimming pool and the studio was elated at the publicity, as though someday it actually would be used for a picture. She had a birthday party on the set, attended by photographers, and everyone embraced for the cameras. At the party, it was announced that she was making a personal appearance for charity that night in Chueen Ravina, the stadium of the Los Angeles Dodgers. "That does it," Buck Hall said. He was convinced, in some way he could not explain, that this was the end. The studio begged her not to go. She had been ill. The nights were damp and cold in California. If she really wanted to do something for charity, she should stay home and do it for Fox. That was on a Friday. She appeared personally that night and everyone said she looked wonderful, standing there at home plate. The following Monday, Mrs. Strasberg called Cukor and said Marilyn was sick again and could not appear. Cukor refused to shoot any more scenes without her. The next morning, her housekeeper called with the same message. Production shut down. But by then, enough scenes had been shot with Miss Monroe to give an idea of her performance. The picture rested on that. The only excuse the studio had ever had was that finally they would have a Marilyn Monroe picture. Out of the sea of troubles, a Venus would arise in color and Cinemascope. The expense could only be justified by a picture that displayed Miss Monroe as the studio knew the public wanted to see her, sprightly and easy and full of fun. Cukor saw all the film on her. He emerged shaken. A meeting was called

with Levathes and other executives. And what some had said should have happened long ago and others claimed would never happen at all finally did happen. Miss Monroe was fired. An actress named Lee Remick was hired to take her place. Weinstein called to tell me the news. He sounded like his old self. "You don't think you'll have to change too much, do you?" he asked anxiously. He was a producer again. I said I didn't know, and went over to Cukor's office. He was planning a new production schedule with Gene Allen and Buck Hall. The atmosphere was subdued. None of us felt pleased at what had happened, even though it meant that now our work might come to something. The studio had finally done something right, but nobody wanted to be on their side. Cukor and I discussed what scenes should be rewritten, since Miss Remick was not the same type as Miss Monroe, but that weekend it all became academic. Dean Martin quit the picture. His contract allowed him approval of the leading lady. He announced his respect for Miss Remick, but said he had signed to do a Marilyn Monroe picture and this was not now the case.

"But he couldn't stand what she was doing!" Weinstein cried, stricken. It seemed perfidy to him. It seemed to me the challenge of the Goths to the Romans. There was nothing the studio could do but pay Martin his salary of three hundred thousand dollars and let him go. The picture was then canceled. That same afternoon, everyone was given him notice, effective at six o'clock that evening. I was cleaning out my desk when Weinstein called. He wanted me to write the final scene of the picture, which had not yet been done. He said it would only take a day to write. I said I would do it if I were paid for the day. He was shocked at this. "You don't understand," he said reprovingly. "They don't have the money." I said good-bye and finished cleaning out my desk and then I said good-bye to my secretary. She said the secretaries in the administration building were worried about Levathes, who had started talking bop talk. She wished me luck and I went over to say good-bye to Cukor. He still thought Miss Monroe's actions were not calculated. "I must say I still like her," he said. "I think she really wanted to do the picture."

On the way out, I ran into Buck Hall, who said the final costs of the production would be around two million dollars. He said that the crew was taking an advertisement in the trade papers, thanking Marilyn Monroe and Dean Martin for putting them out of work. We shook hands then and I got into my car and drove slowly through the deserted streets, past the huge, silent, empty sound stages. The great doors of our set were open and workmen were already dismantling the replica of Cukor's house. I drove out the gate and looked over to the desert that was to become a housing development. The bulldozers were plowing toward the studio now, clumsy and slow and irresistible, and closer than before. #